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MARKING WILD ANIMALS FOR IDENTIFICATION

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Persons who raise wild animals in captivity and others who study their migration and distribution in natural habitats in connection with wildlife research or management are frequently handicapped by lack of information on practical and systematic methods of marking indiviuals for identification. Such information would aid careful breeders in determining the ancestry of any of their animals, the advantage of which is self-evident when it comes to the selection of breeding stock. Application of some practical and uniform system of marking would also enable biological investigators to identify animals trapped and released for field study.

Tattooing and Tagging Ears

The most satisfactory method thus far found for marking animals that have a sufficiently large ear is to tattoo numbers and letters on the inner surface of the ear by means of a hand punch or an electric tattooing needle. Males may be marked in the right ear and females in the left. Ear tags or buttons can be used to mark moose, deer, elk, and antelope, but for the smaller animals these are less satisfactory. Tattooing is usually the most suitable method to use when the ears are large enough for this purpose.

Toe Clipping

In the case of squirrels, skunks, opossums, minks, and many other small rodents and carnivores, the ears of which are too small for tattooing a mark of identification, the best practical method thus far employed for identifying them is to clip the toes close to the footpads on the front feet. A small pair of manicure clippers can be used for the operation.

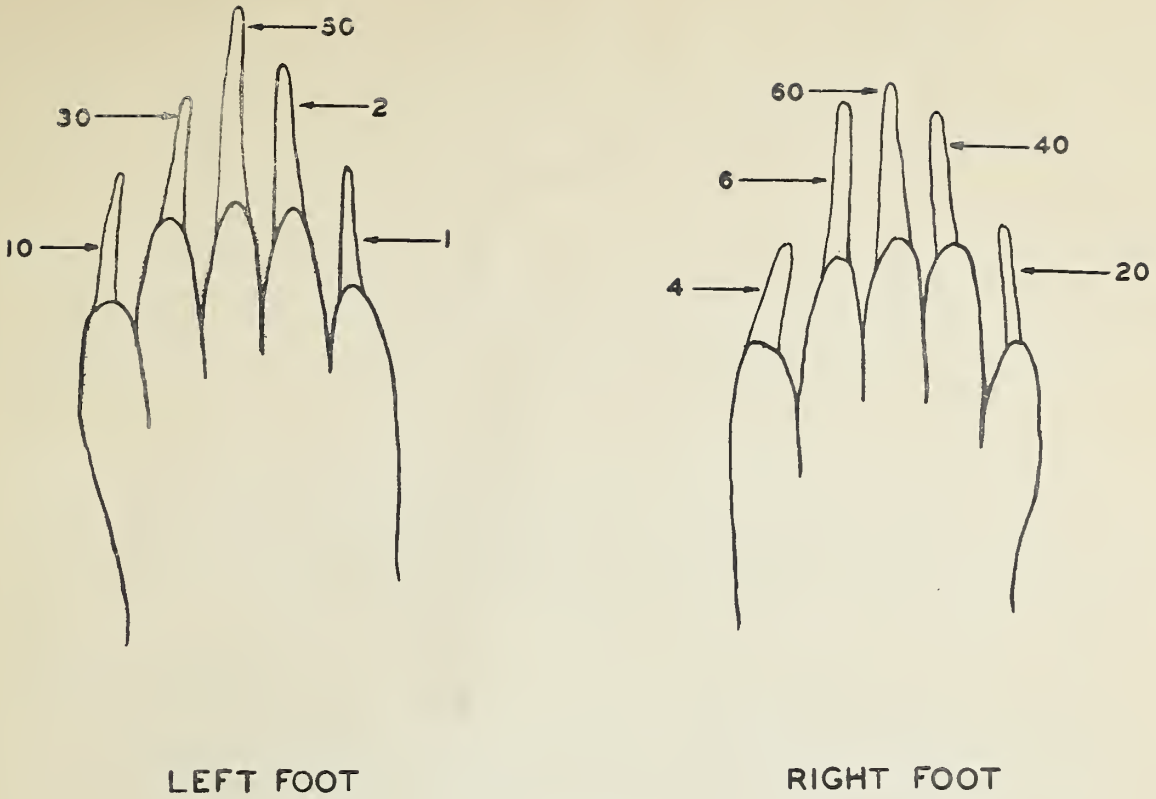

Figure 1.--System of numbering toes of 5-toed animals for identification by toe clipping.

The principle of identification by toe clipping involves a code, under which each toe represents a number. Thus in the accompanying diagram, the first toe on the left foot stands for the number 1; the second toe on the same foot, the number 2. Clipping one of these would mark an animal as either no. 1 or no. 2. Clipping both would mark it as no. 3. By noting the number assigned to the various toes, it will be seen that an animal with both middle toes clipped would be known as no. 110 (combining 50 and 60).

Combinations of the figures indicated are sufficient to mark a large number of animals. It is also possible to combine the figures in such manner as to identify young produced by a certain female if this becomes necessary. Take female no. 40, for example: The only toe clipped for this animal would be the one marked 40. If it is desired to mark a litter produced by this female the operator would clip the toe of the young one indicated by the no. 40 on the right front foot and also the toe marked no. 1 on the left front foot. The next animals would be marked 40 - 2, 40 - 3, etc., by clipping toes for numbers 2 and 1 on the left front foot, and so on.

The basic principles of this system have been employed by biological investigators for several years and will be found applicable to the problems of breeders, wildlife managers, and students of distribution and migration in natural habitat.

Manufacturers of Tattooing Instruments and Ear Tags

In the accompanying list of manufacturers of tattooing instruments and ear tags, prepared for employees of the Government, cooperators, and correspondents who are dealing with larger animals, the inclusion of names implies no endorsement as to quality or price. Names of reputable manufacturers will be added to the list upon notification to the Biological Survey that they are prepared to deliver the items concerned.

Electric Tattoo Instruments

Salt Lake Stamp Company, 47 West Broadway, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Waters Manufacturing Company, 965 Putnam Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

Tattoo Punches

Aluminum Marker Works, 607 Darlington Road, Beaver Falls, Pa.
Illinois Supply Company, Aurora, Ill.
Intermountain Stamp Works, 240 East Second Street, South, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Mechanical Manufacturing Company, Pershing Road and Loomis Street, Chicago, Ill.
Salt Lake Stamp Company, 47 West Broadway, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Ear Tags

Breeders Supply Company, Council Bluffs, Iowa.
F. S. Burch & Company, 1909 Clifton Avenue, Chicago, Ill.
Ketchum Manufacturing Company, Dept. 3, Luzerne, N. Y.
The National Band and Tag Company, Newport, Ky.